

BLINDFOLDED

A Mystery Story
of San FranciscoBY
EARLE ASHLEY WALCOTT

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SYNOPSIS.

CHAPTER I.—Giles Dudley arrives in San Francisco to join his friend and distant relative Henry Wilton, whom he was to assist in an important and mysterious task, and who accompanied Dudley on the ferry boat trip into the city. The remarkable resemblance of the two men is noted and commented on by passengers on the ferry. They see a man with snake eyes, which sends a thrill through Dudley. Wilton postpones an explanation of the strange errand Dudley is to perform, but occurrences cause him to know it is one of no ordinary meaning. Wilton leaves Giles in their room, with instruction to await his return and shoot any one who tries to enter.

CHAPTER II.—Outside there is heard shouts and curses and the noise of a quarrel. Henry rushes in and at his request the roommates quickly exchange clothes, and he hurries out again. Hardly has he gone than Giles is startled by a cry of "Help," and he runs out to find some one being assaulted by a half dozen men. He summons a policeman but they are unable to find any trace of a crime.

CHAPTER III.—Giles returns to his room and hunts for some evidence that might explain his strange mission. He finds a map which he endeavors to decipher. He goes to sleep and is awakened by the presence of some one in his room. They grapple and the person demands to know "where is the boy?" Four figures come to the rescue and bind and gag the intruder. Dudley is mistaken for Henry Wilton, and receives a note regarding money to be paid him.

CHAPTER IV.—Dudley is summoned to the morgue and there finds the dead body of his friend, Henry Wilton, who had been killed during the night outside the building of the night before. He gives the name of James Dudley to the corpse, in order to partially carry out the disguise and to more successfully carry out the task his friend had imposed on him while living. And thus Wilton dies without ever explaining to Dudley the puzzling work he was to perform in San Francisco. Dudley describes a man with the face of a wolf as the murderer of his friend.

CHAPTER V.—In order to discover the secret mission his friend had entrusted to him, Dudley continues his disguise and permits himself to be known as Henry Wilton. He is puzzled over the note he had received asking him to call at the bank for money. He is called before Doddridge Knapp, the King of the Street, and the man who looks like a wolf, Dudley, mistaken for Wilton, is employed by Knapp to assist in a stock brokerage deal.

CHAPTER VI.—"Dicky" takes the supposed Wilton to Mother Borton's. Mother Borton discovers that he is not Wilton, and tells him so in confidence. A mysterious man asks about "the boy." A reply that Dudley makes causes the man to rave. The lights are turned out and a free for all fight follows.

CHAPTER VII.—Giles Dudley tries himself cloaked in a room with Mother Borton who makes a confidant of him. He can learn nothing about the mysterious boy further than that it is Tim Terrill and Darby Meeker who are after him. He told the "Dicky" Niles is a traitor, playing both hands in the game.

CHAPTER VIII.—The supposed Wilton carries out his dead friend's work with Doddridge Knapp and goes to receive orders. He finds the name Horace H. Plymire printed on all the letter forms. He makes his first order at the office of Bockstein & Eppner and his checks are honored. He has his first experience as a capitalist in the Board Room of the Stock Exchange.

CHAPTER IX.—Dudley detects some one peeping through the keyhole of Knapp's door and recognizes the face of Tim Terrill of the snake eyes. Dudley receives a fictitious note purporting to be from Knapp, the forgery of which he readily detects.

CHAPTER X.—Dudley gets his new knowledge of Decker, who is Knapp's enemy on the Board. The forged note mystifies Knapp.

CHAPTER XI.—Dudley visits the home of Knapp and is stricken by the beauty of Luella, the Wolf's daughter. More mystery about "the boy." Luella privately informs Dudley she has discovered his deception and knows he is not Wilton.

CHAPTER XII.—The body of Henry Wilton is committed to the vault.

CHAPTER XIII.—Dudley responds to a note and visits Mother Borton in company with Policeman Corson. He learns the note was a forgery. He is provided with four guards. He learns there is to be no trouble about money as all expenses will be paid, the hire of the guards being paid by one "Richmond."

CHAPTER XIV.—Giles Dudley again visits the Knapp home; he is fascinated by Luella and bored by Mrs. Bowser. Slumming tour through Chinatown is planned.

CHAPTER XV.—Mother Borton visits Dudley to warn him of a plot against him planned by Darby Meeker, Tim Terrill and the rest of the gang. Through the treachery of Dicky Niles, Dudley opens the door into Knapp's office and hears strange groans that nearly cause his blood to curdle.

CHAPTER XVI.—The trip to Chinatown. Giles Dudley learns that the party is being shadowed by Terrill. Luella is dumbfounded when Dudley sees her father coming from an opium den. Luella and Dudley are cut off from the rest of the party and imprisoned in a hallway behind an iron-bound door.

CHAPTER XVII.—Three Chinese ruffians approach the imprisoned couple. A battle ensues. One is knocked down. Giles begins firing. Tim Terrill is seen in the mob. A newly formed mob is checked by shots from Giles' revolver. Policeman Corson breaks down the door with an ax and the couple is rescued. Luella thanks Giles Dudley for saving her life.

CHAPTER XVIII.—Doddridge appears at the office with no traces of the previous night's debauch. Following his instructions Dudley has a notable day in the Stock Exchange, selling Crown Diamond and buying Omega, the object being to crush Decker, Knapp's hated rival.

CHAPTER XIX.—Giles Dudley discovers that he loves Luella Knapp.

CHAPTER XX.—Mother Knapp tells Giles Dudley that "they've discovered where 'the boy' is." The mysterious unknown woman employer of Dudley meets him by appointment with "the boy" who is turned over to Dudley with his guards and they drive with him to the ferry boat to take a train out of the city.

CHAPTER XXI.—Dudley and his faithful guards convey "the boy" by train to the village of Livermore, as per the written instructions. The party is followed. Soon after the party is quartered in the hotel a special train arrives in

CHAPTER XXII.—The "gang" including Darby Meeker and Tim Terrill, lay siege to the hotel and endeavor to capture "the boy" who comes forward to see the fight. "Dickered and," cries Tim Terrill, "when he sees the youngster's face." It's the wrong boy.

"Doan's Ointment cured me of eczema that had annoyed me a long time. The cure was permanent."—Hon. S. W. Matthews, Commissioner Labor Statistics, Augusta, Me.

I have a dim recollection of splashing over miles of level road, drenched with water and buffeted by gusts of wind that faced us more and more, with the monotonous beat of hoofs ever in my ears, and the monotonous stride of the horse beneath me ever racking my tired muscles. Then we slackened pace in a road that wound in sharp descent through a gap in the hills, and the rush and roar of a torrent beneath and beside us, the wind sweeping with wild blasts through the trees that lined the way and covered the hillside and seeming to change the direction of its attack at every moment.

"We'll make it, I reckon," said Thatcher, at last. "It's only two miles farther, and the train hasn't gone up yet."

There was no sign of life about the station as we drew our panting, steaming horses to a halt before it, and no train was in sight. The rain dripping heavily from the eaves was the only sound that came from it, and a dull glow from an engine that lay alone on a siding was the only light that was to be seen.

"What's the time?" asked Thatcher.

"We must have made a quick trip."

"Twenty minutes past three," said I, striking a match under my coat to see my watch face.

"Immortal snakes!" cried Thatcher.

"I'm an idiot. This is Sunday night."

I failed to see the connection of these startling discoveries, but I had spirit enough to argue the case. "It's Monday morning, now."

"Well, it's the same thing. The freight doesn't run to-night."

I awoke to some interest at this announcement.

"Why, it's got to run, or we must take to saddle again for the rest of the way."

"These horses can't go five miles more at that gait, let alone 25," protested Thatcher.

"Well, then, we must get other horses here."

"Come," said Fitzhugh; "what's the use of that when there's an engine on the siding doing nothing?"

"Just the idea. Find the man in charge."

But there did not appear to be any man in charge. The engineer and fireman were gone, and the watchman had been driven to cover by the foul weather.

We looked the iron horse over enviously.

"Why, this is the engine that came up with the special this noon," said Fitzhugh. I remember the number.

"Good! We are ahead of the enemy, then. They haven't had a chance to get the wire, and we beat them on the road. We must find the engineer and get it ourselves."

"I've got an idea," said Fitzhugh.

"It's this: Why not take the machine without asking? I was a fireman once, and I can run it pretty well."

I thought a moment on the risk, but the need was greater.

"Just the thing. Take the money for the horses to your friend there. I'll open the switch."

In a few minutes Fitzhugh was back.

"I told him," he chuckled. "He says it's a jail offense, but it's the only thing we can do."

"It may be a case of life and death," I said. "Pull out."

"There's mighty little steam here—hardly enough to move her," said Fitzhugh from the cab, stirring the fire.

But as he put his hand to the lever she did move easily on to the main track and rested while I reset the switch.

Then I climbed back into the cab and sank down before the warm blaze in a stupor of faintness as the engine glided smoothly and swiftly down the track.

CHAPTER XXV.

A Flutter in the Market.

The gray pall of the storm hung over San Francisco. The dim light of the morning scarcely penetrated into the hallways as we climbed the stairs that led to our lodgings, leaving behind us the trail of dripping garments.

I heaved a sigh of relief as Trent opened the door, and we once more faced the pleasing prospect of warmth, dry clothing and friends.

We had made the run from Niles without incident and had left the engine on a siding at Brooklyn without being observed. If the railroad company still has curiosity, after all these years, to know how that engine got from Niles to Brooklyn, I trust that the words I have just written may be taken as an explanation and apology.

"Where's Barkhouse?" I asked, becoming comfortable once more with dry clothes, a warm room and a fresh bandage on my arm.

"He hasn't shown up, sir," said Trent.

"Owens and Larson went out to look for him toward evening yesterday, but there wasn't a sign of him."

"Try again to-day. You may pick up news at Borton's or some of the waterfront saloons."

"Oh, there was a letter for you," said Trent. "I near forgot."

I snatched the envelope, for the address was in the hand of the Unknown. The sheet within bore the words:

"Where is the boy? Have you removed him? Send the key to Richmond. Let me know when you return, for I must see you as soon as it is safe."

I read the note three or four times and each time I was more bewildered than before. I had left the boy in Livermore, but certainly he was not the one she meant. He was the "wrong boy," and my employer must be well aware that I had taken him at her orders. Or could that expedition be a jest of the enemy to divert my attention? I dismissed this theory as soon as it suggested itself.

The closing portion of the note set

my heart beating fast. At last I was to have the opportunity to meet my mysterious employer face to face. But what explanation was I to make? What reception would I meet when she learned that Henry Wilton had given up his life in her service and that I, who had taken his place, could tell nothing of the things she wished to know?

I wrote a brief note to Richmond stating that I had no key, inclosed the Unknown's note, with the remark that I had returned and gave it to Owens to deliver. I was in some anxiety lest



THE WILLING KNIGHTS, SKEET PORTER FOR THE KENTUCKIAN

he might not know where Richmond was to be found. But he took the note without question, and I lay down with orders that I was to be called in time to reach the opening session of the stock market, and in a moment was fast asleep.

The Stock Exchange was a boiling and bubbling mass of excited men as I reached it. I shouldered my way through the crowd into the buzzing Board-room as the session opened. Excitement thrilled the air, but the opening was listless. All knew that the struggle over Omega was to be settled that day, and that Doddridge Knapp or George Decker was to find ruin at the end of the call, and all were eager to hasten the decisive moment.

I could see nothing of Doddridge Knapp, and the uneasy feeling that he was at Livermore came over me.

What was my duty in case he did not appear? Had he left his fortune at the mercy of the market to follow his lawless schemes? Had he been caught in his own trap, and was he now to be ruined as the result of his own acts?

I might have spared my worry. The call had not proceeded far when the massive form of Doddridge Knapp appeared at the railing. The strong wolf-marks of the face were stronger than ever as he watched the scene on the floor. I looked in vain for a trace upon him of last night's work. If he had been at Livermore he showed no sign of the passions or anxieties that had filled the dark hours.

He nodded carelessly for me to come to him as he caught my eye.

"You have the stock?"

"All safe."

"And the proxies?"

"Just as you ordered."

The King of the Street looked at me sharply.

"Any orders?" I asked at last.

"Be where I can call you the minute I want you," he replied.

"Now, my boy," he continued after a minute, "you are going to see what hasn't been seen in the Boards for years, and I reckon you'll never see it again."

"What is it?" I asked politely. I was prepared for almost any kind of fireworks in that arena.

Doddridge Knapp made no reply, but raised his hand as if to command silence, and a moment later the call of Omega was heard. And, for a marvel, a strange stillness did fall on the throng.

At the word of call I saw Doddridge Knapp step down to the floor of the pit, calm, self-possessed, his shoulders squared and his look as proud and forceful as that of a monarch who ruled by the might of his sword, while a grim smile played about his stern mouth.

The silence of the moment that followed was almost painful, when the voice of Doddridge Knapp rang like a trumpet through the Board-room.

"Five hundred for Omega!"

This was a wild jump from 325 that was marked against the stock at the close on Saturday, but I supposed the King of the Street knew what he was about.

At the bid of Doddridge Knapp a few cries rose here and there, and he was at once the center of a group of gesticulating brokers. Then I saw Decker, pale, eager, alert, standing by the rail across the room, signaling orders to men who howled bids and plunged wildly into the crowd that surrounded his rival.

The bids and offers came back and forth with shouts and barks, yet they made but a murmur compared to the whirlwind of sound that had arisen from the pit at the former struggles I had witnessed. There seemed but a few blocks of the stock on the market.

"This is great," chuckled Wallbridge, taking post before me. "There hasn't been anything like it since Decker captured Chollar in the election of '73. You don't remember that, I guess?"

"I wasn't in the market then," I admitted.

"Lord! Just to hear that!" cried the stout little man, mopping his glistening head frantically and quivering with nervous excitement. "Doddridge Knapp bids 1,500 for the stock and only gets five shares. Oh, why didn't I have a chance to get into this?"

I heard a confused roar, and

which rose the fierce tones of Doddridge Knapp.

"How many shares has he got to-day?" I asked.

"Not 40 yet."

"And the others?"

"There's been about 2,000 sold."

I gripped the rail in nervous tension. The battle seemed to be going against the King of the Street.

"Oh!" gasped Wallbridge, trembling with excitement. "Did you hear that? There! It's 1,700—now it's 1,775! Whew!"

I echoed the exclamation.

"Oh, why haven't I got 10,000 shares?" he groaned.

"Who is getting them?"

"Knapp got the last lot. O-oh, look there! Did you ever see the like of that?"

I looked. Decker, hatless, with hair disheveled, had leaped the rail and was hurrying into the throng that surrounded Doddridge Knapp.

"There was never two of 'em on the floor before," cried Wallbridge.

At Decker's appearance the brokers opened a lane to him, the cries fell and there was an instant of silence as the kings of the market thus came face to face.

I shall never forget the sight. Doddridge Knapp, massive, calm, forceful, surveyed his opponent with unruffled composure. He was dressed in a light gray-brown suit that made him seem larger than ever. Decker was nervous, disheveled, his dress of black setting off the pallor of his face, till it seemed as white as his shirt bosom, as he fronted the King of the Street.

The foes faced each other, watchful as two wrestlers looking to seize an opening, and the Board-room held its breath. Then the crowd of brokers closed in again and the clamor rose once more.

I could not make out the progress of the contest, but the trained ear of Wallbridge interpreted the explosions of inarticulate sound.

"Phew! Listen to that! Two thousand, 2,100, 2,150. Great snakes! See her jump!" he cried. "Decker's getting it."

My heart sank. Doddridge Knapp must have smothered his brain once more in the Black Smoke, and was now paying the price of indulgence. And his plans of wealth were a sacrifice to the wild and criminal scheme into which he had entered in his contest against the Unknown.

The clang of the gong recalled me from the reverie that had shut out the details of the scene before me.

"There! Did you hear that?" groaned Wallbridge. "Omega closes at 2,600 and Decker takes every tick. Oh, why didn't you have me on the floor out there? By the great horn spoon, I'd 'a' had every share of that stock, and wouldn't 'a' paid more than half as much for it, neither."

I sighed and turned, sick at heart, to meet the King of the Street as he shouldered his way from the floor.

There was not a trace of his misfortune to be read in his face. But Decker, the victor, moved away like a man oppressed, pale, staggering, half-fainting, as though the nervous strain had brought him to the edge of collapse.

Doddridge Knapp made his way to the doors and signed me to follow him, but spoke no word until we stood beside the columns that guard the entrance.

"That was warm work," said Doddridge Knapp after a moment's halt.

"I was very sorry to have it turn out so," I said.

A grim smile passed over his face.

"I wasn't," he growled good humoredly. "I thought it was rather neatly done."

I looked at him in surprise.

"Oh, I forgot that I hadn't seen you," he continued. "And like enough I shouldn't have told you if I had. The truth is, I found a block of 4,000 shares on Saturday night, and made a combination with them."

"Then the mind is yours?"

"The directors will be."

"But you were buying shares this morning."

"A mere optical illusion, Wilton. I was in fact a seller, for I had shares to spare."

"It was a very good imitation."

"I don't wonder you were taken in, my boy. Decker was fooled to the tune of about \$1,000,000 this morning. I thought it was rather neat for a clean-up."

I thought so, too, and the King of the Street smiled at my exclamations over his cleverness. But my congratulations were cut short as a small dark man pressed his way to the corner where we stood, and whispered in Doddridge Knapp's ear.

"Was he sure?" asked the King of the Street.

"Those were his exact words."

"When was this?"

"Not five minutes ago."

"Run to Caswell's. Tell him to wait for me."

The messenger darted off and we followed briskly. Caswell, I found, was an attorney, and we were led at once to the inner office.

"Come in with me," said my employer. "I expect I shall need you, and it will save explanations."

The lawyer was a tall, thin man, with elderly, expressionless features, but his eyes gave life to his face with their keen, almost brilliant vision.

"Decker's playing the joker," said the King of the Street. "I've beaten him in the market, but he's going to make a last play with the directors. There's a meeting called for 12:30. They are going to give him a two years' contract for milling, and the talk of declaring 20,000 shares of his stock invalid."

"How many directors have you got?"

"Two—Barber and myself. Decker thinks he has Barber."

"Then you want an injunction?"

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"Yes."

The lawyer looked at his watch.

"The meeting is at 12:30. H'm. You'll have to hold them for half an hour—maybe an hour."

"Make it half an hour," growled Doddridge Knapp. "Just remember that time is worth \$1,000 a second till that injunction is served."

He went out without another word, and there was a commotion of clerks as we left.

"How's your nerve, Wilton?" inquired the King of the Street calmly.

"Are you ready for some hot work?"

"Quite ready."

"Have you a revolver about you?"

"Yes."

"Very good. I don't want you to kill any one; but it may come in handy as an evidence of your good intentions."

He led the way to California street below Sansome, where we climbed a flight of stairs and went down a hall to a glass door that bore the gilt and painted letters, "Omega Mining Co., J. D. Storey, Pres't."

"There's five minutes to spare," said my employer. "He may be alone."

A stout, florid man, with red side-whiskers and a general air of good living, sat by an over-shadowing desk in the handsome office, and looked sourly at us as we entered. He was not alone, for a young man could be seen in a side room that was lettered "Secret."

"Ah."

"What?"